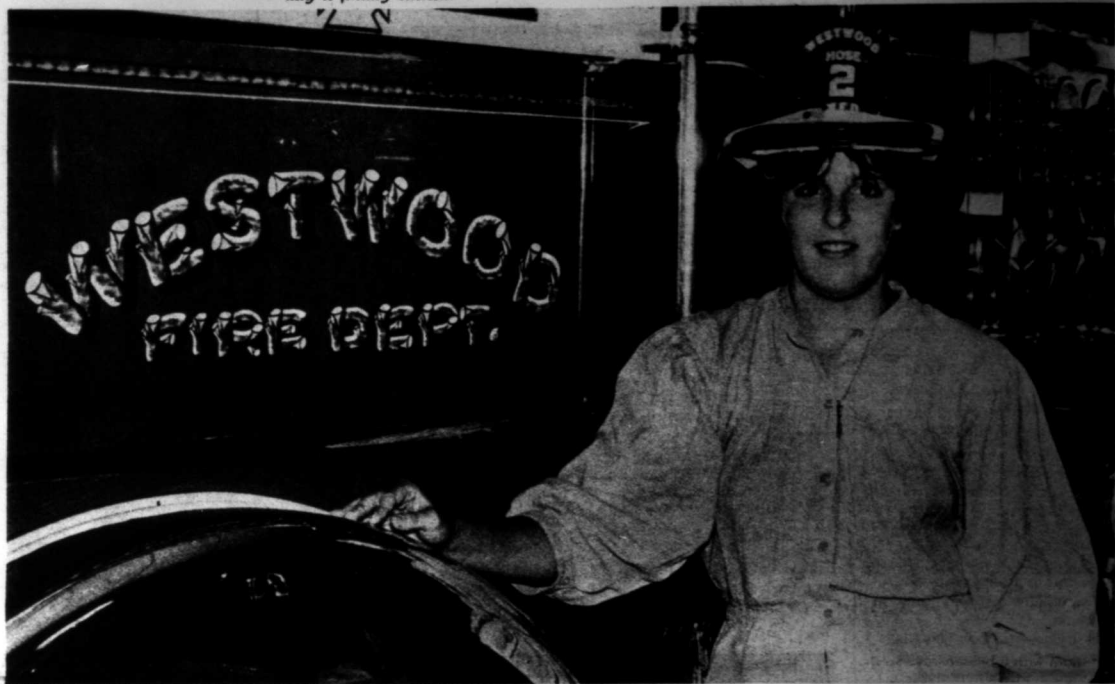


"I always said someday I'm going to be one (a firefighter) and one day it finally clicked."



Although Jill Scheideler was the only woman in her firefighting class, she said that everyone accepted her and helped her out whenever she needed a hand.

Westwood gets female firefighter

Jill Scheideler works on the service desk at K mart 3202, Westwood, New Jersey.

The borough fire department has always been a familiar sight to Jill Scheideler, the first female firefighter in Pascack Valley. Scheideler said she and her brothers grew up around the department because her father, uncle and cousins were all members.

"I always said someday I'm going to be one and one day it finally clicked," she said. That day happened early this year in January when Scheideler filled out an application for the department. She said she made her decision then because she had to wait until she was 18 years old. The borough does not have a junior fire department.

The application process consisted of an endorsed written form, a physical examination and an interview. She said she received endorsement from other members of the department rather than from

her father. Following the approval of the department she was voted in and started a six-month probationary period while going to the Bergen County Fire Academy to train.

At the academy she was the only woman in her class but she said everybody learned to adapt and they all became friends. The skills she learned included first aid, knots, forced entries, salvage techniques and basic fire behavior.

Miss Scheideler explained that they had to fight two fires which were set up in a smoke house and to learn venting procedures. Venting is the process used for maintaining ventilation of a structure.

"We learned everything about fires, including every single part of a sprinkler," she said. One of the most important pieces of equipment she was taught to use was the Scott-pak, which is the air tank and mask set frequently used by firefighters.

"I got a lot of help from everyone here and there," she said. In the borough department she was especially thankful to Warren Thomas for showing her the truck and the Scott-pak.

The only difficulties she remembers were in strength, which she said she overcame through confidence. She recalled one incident

in school when she was holding a 16-foot brass nozzle alongside a five story building with two men. It was hard to hold on and they asked if she needed help, but the concentration and will power helped her make it, she said. "That experience helped me a lot with my confidence," she said.

Many people in and out of the department supported Scheideler in her efforts. She said her mother was "the 'A' number one" supporter for her. She described other family members having mixed feelings at first and then realizing that it was something she really wanted to do.

The only reason the family may have been hesitant was because her uncle was killed fighting a fire in the borough, she said.

Her friends also support her and even drive her to the fire station when she gets a call, since she does not have a car. She said most times she goes to the firehouse with her father.

The reaction at the department toward their first woman was mixed. Chief Donald Fournier said, "Scheideler is doing everything expected of a firefighter."

Firefighter Charlie Haffler said that at first he did not like the idea that she was a woman. He

said he hasn't had enough time to decide and see her in action yet. Scheideler will take her final evaluation test Oct. 15.

Besides being a firefighter, Scheideler is also a member of the department's Ladies Auxiliary. She said she joined this organization, which is for wives and daughters of firefighters, before she joined the department. She commented that now she often gets joked about whether her boyfriend would be allowed to join the auxiliary.

Contrasting to her life as a firefighter, Scheideler is employed as a licensed beautician. She is soon to begin working at Park Avenue Coiffures in Park Ridge.

She now works in the shoe department at K mart. "I hate being bored," she said. "I've always had to have something to do."

"I feel good about myself now," she said, "because I have reached my goal."

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